



# METEOR

*THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GREENBELT ASTRONOMY CLUB, INC.*

**Volume 9, Issue 103 October 2001**  
**The Orionid Edition**

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- The Meteor is the official publication of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club, Greenbelt, Md. and is distributed monthly as a privilege of membership. Articles and other contributions are welcome. Membership in the Greenbelt Astronomy Club is open to anyone interested in astronomy. The club meets on the last non holiday Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at the H. B. Owens Science Center.
  - The Greenbelt Astronomy Club is a non profit community based organization with the goal of encouraging public interest in science; astronomy in particular.
  - More detailed information on our club activities and organization can be found at our web site. The Editor of this newsletter can be contacted at: [greenbeltastroclub@yahoo.com](mailto:greenbeltastroclub@yahoo.com)
  - The Clubs location on the world wide web is: <http://lheawww.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/outreach/gac/GAC.html>
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## **Next Greenbelt Astronomy Club Star Party and Meeting**

Star parties are scheduled for Saturdays, October 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> at James N. Wolfe Ball fields, Northway in Greenbelt. A map is available on the club web site. Hopelessly overcast skies will cause this event to be canceled. You are invited to attend and bring a friend with cookies. Since star parties are dedicated to observing the night sky, they will only be held if the sky is clear enough to permit observing. Star parties will not be held if skies are overcast or mostly cloudy. Observing begins at dusk.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club will be Thursday, October at 7:30 PM at the H. B. Owens Science Center on Greenbelt Rd. in Lanham, Md. Topic: The Basics of Spectra Presenter: Richard Moore Mr. Moore will present an overview of the study of stellar spectra, covering the history, the electromagnetic spectrum and the roll of spectra in identifying elements. All events and meetings are open to anyone with an interest in astronomy and cookies.

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## **November and December Meetings**

By John Settle

The meetings for November and December promise some truly stimulating speakers. For the November 29<sup>th</sup> meeting our special guest will be Louis A Mayo of the Goddard Space Flight Center. Mr. Mayo will be speaking on Titan, the largest moon in our solar system. Titan will be the subject of much study by the Galileo spacecraft on its arrival to the Saturn system. Thank you to Matt Elliott for his efforts in making Mr. Mayo's visit possible. In December, we go from high tech space missions to ancient mythology when Mr. Jim Link of Prince George's Community College will be the speaker at Our December 20<sup>th</sup> meeting. Mr. Link is an educator with the "Explorations Unlimited" program of the community college will speak on mythology of constellations in which he will explore the accumulated cultural wisdom of Greek, Roman, Chinese and other traditional mythologies. Mythology supplies a vast array of themes, adventures, conflicts and characters. There is a special link to our hobby with many cultures celebrating their mythologies in the constellations of the night sky.

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## **Carve a Jack o' Lantern for the 20<sup>th</sup>?**

Our October 20<sup>th</sup> Star party date co-incides with greenbelts traditional "Pumpkin Walk" in the woods around Northway Fields. The event is sponsored each year by the Committee to Save the Greenbelt. Quit a number of residents drive down Northway that evening and members might want to consider joining in on the fun by bringing their own Jack o' Lanterns and inviting walk attendees to enjoy the splendors of our universe through their telescopes.

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**Greenbelt Astronomy Club Regular Meeting of September 20, 2001**

By Valerie O'Brien, Secretary

The members of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club met at 7:30pm on Thursday, September 20, 2001. The meeting was held in the Owens Science Center. There were 27 attendees.

The meeting was called to order by Club President John Settle who requested that Valerie O'Brien read the minutes to the August 23 Meeting. The minutes having been read, the floor was open for new business.

- Main Presentation : Star Chart Practicum
  - Presenter : Russ Waugh, H.B. Owens Planetarium Director
  - Russ Waugh gave a tour of the night sky within the planetarium at the Owens Science Center. Club members worked with their star charts and planispheres to practice navigational skills both in very dark skies as well as light polluted skies. Go to the following web address to get the star chart for each day : <http://www.otterbein.edu/dept/phys/is410/plan.html>.
- Announcements : Book Order
  - An order will be placed for multiple copies of "The Observer's Handbook". Please contact Steve Lesnik if you are interested in purchasing a copy of this book at a discount rate.
- Announcements : Greenbelt City Council
  - Kelby Brick is running for Greenbelt City Council and was present to give his views on topics that concern the Greenbelt Astronomy Club. He does not support the lighting of the ballfields at Northway Road. Mr. Brick is an attorney at the state and city level.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 PM.

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**Greenbelt Astronomy Club Regular Meeting of September 27, 2001**

By Valerie O'Brien, Secretary

The members of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club met at 7:30pm on Thursday, September 27, 2001. The meeting was held in the Greenbelt Community Center. There were 25 attendees.

The meeting was called to order by Club President John Settle. John Settle requested that Valerie O'Brien read the minutes to the September 20 Meeting. The minutes having been read, the floor was open for new business.

- Announcements :
  - The Chromatics will be performing at the New Deal Café on Saturday, September 29 at 8:30pm until closing promoting their new CD-ROM "Astro-Capella V2.0".
  - The October 20 Star Party coincides with the Greenbelt "Pumpkin Walk" that will take place in the woods at the end of Northway Road. This is a great opportunity to reach out to the public and share knowledge about astronomy. Bring a lit jack-o-lantern so that interested citizens will be able to find you.
  - Observing sessions are scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 13 and 20 at Northway Road beginning at dusk.
  - The next regular meeting will be on Thursday, October 25 with club member Richard Moore presenting a brief talk on the basics of the spectra.
  - The board of directors meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 18 at the Greenbelt Community Center.
  - The Maryland Section of IDA has a light pollution convention scheduled for November 12 at the MD Science Center from 6:30pm – 10:30pm. They have a few openings for speakers still. For info., contact Brian Eney, President of IDA-MD at [www.westminsterastro.org/ida\\_md](http://www.westminsterastro.org/ida_md).
- Business Item : Telescope Committee Report – Bill McHale
  - The work continues on the 17.5" mirror for the club's Dobsonian telescope and there is a possibility of a Dobsonian-drive system for the telescope. Please join in if you are interested.

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- Business Item : The Observatory Project Update
  - The Astronomy club will reimburse the city of Greenbelt up to \$15,000 for costs of design, permitting and construction. The estimates are for the observatory to be erected in the spring of 2002 at Observatory Hill at Northway Road. The club will enter into a Use Agreement with the City of Greenbelt to address the various issues of maintenance, insurance and other aspects regarding management and ownership.
- Business item: The Board of Directors met during the regular meeting period and conducted routine club business.
- Treasurer's Report : Bill McHale stated that the club had \$794.80 in the operations account and \$7051.25 in the capital account. Mr. McHale reported that from the month of August through the Labor Day weekend, the club had taken in \$1,055.00 in donations. For the three week period from the end of the Labor Day Festival to the present, the club had received \$27.00 in donations.
- Main Presentation : Astro Images by Club Members
  - Club members brought their laptop computers and borrowed the LCD projector from the city and enjoyed the cinematic display of astro images that were captured using web-cams and other do-it-yourself devices. Ed Abel, Cliff Gordon, Susima, Steve Barks and Jeff Guerber shared their views of sunspots, the moon phases, nebulae and other items of interest.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 PM.

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### Maryland Section I.D.A to Host Convention

By Brian Eney

Hello,

My name is Brian Eney. I am the President of the Maryland Section of the International Dark Sky Association. Coming up on November 12<sup>th</sup> we will be hosting a convention, Shedding Light On Light Pollution, at the Maryland Science Center in Baltimore from 6:30 PM to 10:00 PM. This is in response to House Joint Resolution 14, forming a task force to study light pollution. The event will talk about the problems and solutions of light pollution. Several government officials have been invited to attend. Admission will be FREE! A general public is more than welcome to attend.

We are still looking for speakers. If any one of your Astronomy Club Members would like to give a 10 to 15 minute presentations please contact me. Spread the word!

Clear and Darker (we are working on that) Skies,

Brian Eney

President of IDA-MD [www.westminsterastro.org/ida\\_md](http://www.westminsterastro.org/ida_md)

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### 2001 Black Forrest Star Party

By Martha L. Gay

Carol and I went to Potter County, PA for the BFSP. A great sky. The Milky Way was a shimmering band and the stars really popped out. It clouded over Sat. AM, so we missed the planets - but they were there on Sunday! Unlike Northway Field, this site also had Sagittarius and Scorpio. The teapot was especially obvious. Oh, it was grand! Carol saw the Andromeda galaxy in binoculars and couldn't believe how BIG it is. Around here it's a fuzz ball.

There were some really nice scopes there, too. There was at least one 24" in the Valley of the Dobs, several at 18". There was also a 10" refractor that had everyone OOOHHing. Unfortunately the owner was having trouble with the motor drive on his Losmandy mount and was doing everything by hand. I have to go see if any of the images came out ok that I took through the C-5 Gary Hand loaned me. Actually, I have to see if I still have a laptop - it got rather dewy.

Martha L. Gay

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## **Meteor**

### **Report from the September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2001 Greenbelt City Council** By Doug Love, Vice President and Chairman of the Observatory Committee

This item was read by Mayor Davis at about 10:30:

#### **21. Astronomy Club Observatory**

Staff has been working with the Greenbelt Astronomy Club to develop a supported the Northway Fields complex as the location for the observatory.

A conceptual site plan has been developed showing the observatory placed on a 20' by 20'-30' platform, located on the top of the mound of stockpiled materials, next to Wolfe field. This location will not conflict with use of the ball field or the adjacent parking area.

Proposals have been sought for design services for the facility. It is estimated that professional services to design an adequate structure for the intended use will be \$10,000. Material costs are estimated to range from \$2,000 - \$3,000.

The Greenbelt Astronomy Club has undertaken a fund-raising effort that will make available approximately \$15,000 for this project. On behalf of the club, Mr. Settle has agreed to commit the entire amount toward the costs to design and construct the observatory platform. In exchange, the City would provide the sweat equity to accomplish the project, with staff handling the design, permitting, and construction details.

The project location and conceptual plan have been reviewed by PRAB but have not yet been reviewed by APB. Therefore, any action recommended for Council is conditioned upon favorable reaction by these boards.

Agenda Comments, Regular Meeting, September 24, 2001  
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It is recommended that Council approves the conceptual site plan, and the proposed cost/task sharing arrangement described above. Staff recommends that the City initially absorbs the costs for the project, and present to The Astronomy Club a final cost accounting at the conclusion of the project. The Astronomy Club would reimburse the City up to \$15,000 of project costs. Staff estimates that design and permitting for the project will take three or four months. We should therefore expect that the project can be completed in the early spring. This schedule has been reviewed with Mr. Settle.

While detailed design and permitting are underway, staff and the Astronomy Club will be working on a use agreement that will set forth each party's rights and responsibilities relative to the use of the observatory. This agreement will require final approval by the City Council. It is recommended that Council authorize staff to proceed with the observatory project as follows:

1. Proceed with design at the Northway fields site, as described.
2. City staff will handle design, permitting and construction. Staff costs will be considered the City's contribution to the project.
3. The Astronomy Club will reimburse the city up to \$15,000 for costs of design, permitting and construction.
4. Staff will develop a use agreement to be reviewed and approved by the City Council at a future date.
5. Staff will return this item to Council's agenda should either APB or PRAB identify concerns that cannot be addressed within the context of the approval requested of Council on this date. (CWC) City Planning Director Celia Craze was at the podium, and answered questions from the Council. In short, the slab location on top of the hill is 145' from the ballfield fence, allowing ample parking. The detailed site design will be created by the engineer when "he is brought on board".

Mr. White asked about the results of the soils test. Celia said that if it shows that a slab would break up or tilt, they will pour individual posts for decking. (Stability of the piers was not addressed!)

Rodney Roberts asked about landscaping, fencing and drainage. Landscaping was not addressed, and I suspect we should send Rodney a letter about our plans in this area. Celia noted that a fence would cause problems with the view, and all the city is requiring is a security gate and lock on the observatory door.

The Mayor asked about any future need for the "stockpiled materials" that the hill is made of. Celia said that this is probably the best use for those materials.

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Mr. White asked if this will come back to council after the 5 items are articulated. Mrs. Craze said that it will.

The recommendation was passed unanimously on a voice vote.

Noting that Doug Love was present, representing the Astronomy Club, Mayor Davis asked him about the suggested repairs. He replied that the Observatory Maintenance Committee had made the repairs to the woodwork, but that he had not yet inspected it, but plans to do so soon.

He also noted that the observatory was to be moved, and he hoped that the door will be closable after the move takes place.

Mr. Love also suggested that we call the stockpiled materials mound by the preferred name of Observatory Hill. This allowed council to ask if it would be called Observatory Hill Observatory, to which Mr. Turnbull said, "OHO!", and Mr. White started singing "I found my thrill on Observatory Hill", so no answer was expected. After all, it was close to 11 p.m.

One other item on the council agenda is new city entryway signage that will incorporate the signs of churches and civic organizations that line the road. The Mayor looked at Mr. Love when she said that "I imagine that there are many other organizations that will want to add their signs." Mr. Love will measure one of the civic organization signs and report the size that the astronomy club sign needs to be to join the others on the new entryway signs.

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**That's All for Now, Folks!!**